

EXHIBIT LL

SNOCROSS

The Evolution of the Sport

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**From the racetrack
to the TV screen—
snocross proves
bigger can be better**

How can a local winter sport go from sledding through the Snowbelt to "catching major air" internationally? Snocross journeyed from there to here via two major milestones and an invention called the TV. Although snocross has only fairly

recently made its mark on the TV screen, the sport has been around longer than most of its fans, and racers, have been alive. Today's extreme sport demographic is primarily made up of males age 10-24, most likely familiar with famed ESPN X-Games lore. But, snocross' roots go deeper than that.

Snocross today evolved from a Scandinavian style of racing where tracks were much longer and incorporated more jumps than their North American counterpart. The sport made its way over the broad Atlantic foam with welcome relief from those bored with the more prevalent oval and cross country racing. Neither sport was very "spectator-friendly, as fans could never watch an entire cross country race from one spot, and long grooming delays overshadowed the outcomes of oval racing. Snocross eliminated those factors when it arrived in North America with a shorter course made of bumps that didn't need to be frequently groomed.

IN THE BEGINNING

The first of two major revolutions within the sport of snocross took place when races started to be held in Canterbury Downs in Shakopee, MN, said Greg Creamer, long-time snocross announcer. Prior to that, the sport was already proving it could be

engaging by drawing thousands of spectators to events promoted by media and race organizations.

But, it was at Canterbury when Toni Haikkonen changed the way the sport was raced. Before Haikkonen, a Finnish-bred racer, took to the North American circuit, riders were not capitalizing on track jumps. Instead, racers went with the attitude that the sooner the sled returned to ground, the easier it would be to win.

"Getting 'air' was perceived to be wasted time," Creamer said. But, Haikkonen determined that if he could hit the



first jump so fast that he skips over the next three, he could actually gain more ground. From that point on, snocross became a "high-flying" sport. Incidentally, it also was then that manufacturers began to recognize a need to produce sturdier snowmobiles. It was important sleds didn't fall apart on impact.

WATCH THIS

Snocross' new, high-flying, watch-me-while-I-shock-you mentality eventually brought TV into the whole theatrical scene. Although the tube didn't directly revolutionize the sport like Haikkonen's style did, the TV did make it possible for the sport to continue to evolve. A broader awareness of the sport was making it more popular than ever.

"Until TV deals were made, this was a very local, very novel sport and it didn't really reach the mainstream," said John Schult, AMSOIL race manager. "When it became televised, it raised the stature of the sport."

Arctic Cat Race Manager Brian Sturgeon, said that not only did TV succeed in drawing more interest in attending a race in person, but for the first time TV allowed the sport to reach those in regions other than the Snowbelt. Sturgeon said he has been approached by Arctic Cat ATV and watercraft consumers in warmer climates of the United States who say they tune in to snocross to see how company's recreational products stack up against



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other brands. It creates brand awareness, he said. It allows consumers to see what companies have to offer in terms of other products or technological advancements.

Television has even resulted in a desire for those southern sun-seekers to give

snowmobiling a try for themselves.

"I have friends in the south who see it and want to try it," Ski-Doo racer, Blair Morgan said.

But what makes them interested?

THE X-FACTOR

"People are watching snocross because it's a new sport," Sturgeon said. "It's also exciting and unique because of the winter conditions it takes place on."

Perhaps those are the very reasons that led ESPN to include the sport in

its famed Winter X-Games in 1998.

Today, many people credit the all-sports network with raising the status of snocross to paramount levels.

"Nothing prior to the X-Games put snowmobiling on the level of international

coverage that it did," said World Snowmobile Association head, Joe Duncan. Seven years later, snocross is still growing in popularity at the X-Games.

"Every year we take a look at what our sports are, and we take a look at the progression of that sport in action sports," said Melissa Gullotti of ESPN. "With snocross, there's an opportunity for longevity." The X-Games breaks viewership records every year and snocross always has a good turnout, she said. Those high turnout records may be a testament to the loyalty of snocross fans.

"They're definitely hardcore fans," Gullotti said. "They're a lot like NASCAR fans in that they usually follow a specific rider and even follow the clothing, also."



SIDETRACKS

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those people have a discretionary income of more than \$250 billion. And it's not just snowmobile-related companies taking notice, either.

Thanks to TV, sponsors and their products get more visibility, which has led to an

Manufacturers across various industries have recognized this hardcore following and are capitalizing on it, making snowcross an even bigger and more influential sport than ever before within and outside of the snowmobile world.

THE SNOWBALL EFFECT

Since snowcross has earned its spot on TV screens across the world, two noticeable differences have occurred within the sport. One difference is that it is easier for drivers to secure sponsorship agreements.

"It's advantageous for companies to get involved," Schult said about companies who sponsor snowcross drivers. "Snowcross attracts a very young crowd with discretionary money."

He's right. Last year, more than \$19 billion were spent on the sport in the United States and Canada, according to the Blair Morgan Racing Team website. More than 58 million people are fans of extreme sports including snowcross. Combined,





increase in the amount and types of sponsors supporting snowcross as well as the amount of money available to the sport and its drivers to help defray racing expenses. Companies outside of the snowmobile industry are taking advantage of opportunities to increase their product visibility and to reach a certain age group at the same time with their advertisements on sleds and at races. For instance, the U.S. Air Force sponsors the AMSOIL team in hopes of catching the eyes of young men and women who may want to join the military. But, it's not just the advertised companies that reap the benefits of sponsorship.

In reality, sponsorship affects everyone from the sponsors themselves, to the drivers and race teams, to the sled consumers.

"It was almost impossible to get sponsors prior to TV," Polaris Race Manager, Tom Rager, Sr. said. That has changed. "Sponsorships are an opportunity to showcase products, which might increase sales," he said. "The TV helps the consumer a lot because manufacturers are more supportive now... which allows racers to spend money on testing, which in turn benefits consumers."

"Most things put on race sleds end up on the market for consumers," he said. Changes in product development and

engineering are the other noticeable difference the snowmobile industry has experienced since the onslaught of televised races. Arctic Cat media man, Jay Lusignan, said his company began to get really serious about racing 10 years ago when they incorporated the VR chassis into their sled. The company wanted to find ways to win on the racetrack, which could then result in engineering that would benefit their general consumers, also.

"We get feedback from consumers who are racing fans wondering, 'why can't we get that on our sled?'" Lusignan said. Other companies experience the same thing.

One prime example is Ski-Doo's R&V

rider platform, which according to Creamer was the second major revolution in the sport of snowcross. That revolution has extended the life of the sport, for now. However, Creamer wonders how much longer snowcross can survive at the level of competition and fan interest that it's at now. He said he believes that once more manufacturers incorporate the rider-forward platform into their sleds, more attention will be paid to refining sled components rather than inventing new ones.

If sleds stop evolving, can the sport keep growing?

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